R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 075 RC 002 140

THE STATUS OF RURAL AMERICA.

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PUB DATE 23 OCT 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.32 6P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGEMENT, *EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGEMENT, HEALTH SERVICES, HOUSING DEFICIENCIES, LOW INCOME, MIGRATION, MEDICAL SERVICES, *OPPORTUNITIES, *RURAL AREAS, *RURAL YOUTH, RURAL EDUCATION, RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, STATUS, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION,

THE YOUTH OF RURAL AMERICA ARE NOT AFFORDED EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, ARE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, EXPERIENCE INADEQUATE MEDICAL SERVICES, AND FAIL IN GENERAL TO REALIZE THE ADVANTAGES OF THEIR CITY COUNTERPARTS. THESE CONDITIONS FACING RURAL YOUTH ARE NOT CONFINED TO ANY SINGLE AREA OF THE COUNTRY, BUT ARE WIDESPREAD ENOUGH THAT THEY CONSTITUTE A NATIONAL PROBLEM. THE PROBLEMS OF POVERTY AND MISERY ARE TRANSPORTED FROM THE ISOLATION OF RURAL AREAS TO THE CONGESTED AREAS OF CITIES THROUGH THE MIGRATION OF THE RURAL POPULACE. THIS MASS MIGRATION FROM RURAL TO URBAN AREAS HAS SERVED AT LEAST AS A PARTIAL STIMULANT IN THE RECENT RIOTS OF OUR LARGE CITIES. BY PROVIDING WAYS AND MEANS FOR THE RURAL PEOPLE TO ENJOY FULL AND ABUNDANT LIVES THE TIDE OF MIGRATION MIGHT BE TURNED, WHICH SHOULD ULTIMATELY BENEFIT BOTH RURAL AND URBAN AREAS. WHILE MASSIVE FEDERAL ASSISTANCE WILL BE NECESSARY TO ACCOMPLISH THIS TASK, IT IS NOT A TASK TO BE LEFT ENTIRELY WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, BUT WILL NECESSITATE THE COOPERATION, PLANNING, AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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ED015075

General Session

Speech presented at
NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE
ON RURAL YOUTH
October 23-26, 1967
Washington, D. C.

RECEIVED JAN 5 1968 NMSU E.R.I.C.

THE STATUS OF RURAL AMERICA

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Governor of Kentucky
Chairman, President's Commission on Rural Poverty

I am grateful for the opportunity to meet here with you this morning and discuss with you some of the problems and some of the opportunities that face rural youth in America today.

This conference has included a wide range of subjects all of which bear on the larger subject of rural youth and which by their number and diversity point up the size of the task this conference has set for itself. That task--as I see it--is to find out all we can about youth in rural America today and to generate some ideas and some actions that will improve youth opportunities and increase youth abilities.

I congratulate those who thought up and planned this conference for recognizing the need and for determining the issues. I am certain that focusing so many alert and active minds on the subjects before us is bound to produce results.

I am particularly impressed by the young participants in this morning's program. Whenever you talk with leaders from the organizations that are represented here today, you talk with people who know a great deal about rural America and about rural youth.

My part on the program is to discuss with you some of the characteristics of rural America today with, of course, a special emphasis on young people. A great deal of what I will have to say has been generated and prompted by my work over the past year as chairman of the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty.

It was my good fortune to serve with a capable and hard working commission, and I feel I have learned a great deal during this association. I appreciate the President's giving me this assignment and I am grateful for the dedication and the concern of my fellow commission members.

To me rural America symbolizes--and has always symbolized--great and boundless opportunity, a place where a man may express himself to the fullest, unhampered by the restrictions of our cities and limited only by his own imagination and his own ability.

Our fathers were impressed by the vastness of this continent and by the

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challenges it offered. They chose not to stay put in the comfort and safety of our cities but to constantly confront new and unsettled areas of this expansive and beautiful country, probing for new opportunities, for new and better places to live and prosper.

They were not deterred by hardships, the isolation and the labor involved in exploring and developing rural America because they had a vision of the greatness that could be America's and the greatness of the life they and their children could lead in a tamed and bountiful land.

They started farms, established villages and trading centers, built churches and schools and tied them all together with political institutions in which the will of the people was supreme and in which each individual was expected to participate.

The dream they dreamed of the advantages and opportunities of rural America was no idle dream. It was based on God's great gifts of rich soil, abundant water, magnificent stands of timber; gigantic mineral deposits and a most favorable climate. It was reinforced by the presence of an industrial people and a system of government that protected and promoted their ambitions.

The dream they dreamed we still dream today. We dream it because, although Rural America has achieved greatness, large portions of that dream for entirely too many people are as yet unfulfilled.

I see in rural America--as I said earlier--a symbol of opportunity, a place where youth may make the most of talent and ambition. But as I look at the current status of rural America, as I have been asked to do in this speech, I see many other things--disturbing things, things not in keeping with the promise and potential of our great nation.

I see in rural America a place where fourteen million Americans live in poverty.

I see in rural America a place where educational levels are lower than in our cities and where many schools are inferior.

I see in rural America inadequate health services, severe shortages of health personnel and institutions, unnecessary physical suffering and nutritional problems.

I see in rural America poor housing, slums, lack of sanitation facilities.

I see in rural America isolation caused by poor transportation.

I see in rural America inadequate local government.

I see in rural America clogged and polluted streams, eroded and poisoned

soil, wasted forest resources.

I see in rural America a shortage of government programs designed to fight poverty.

I see in rural America hopelessness and dejection on the part of many people who have never found the good life they have a right to expect.

I see in rural America a tendency on the part of young people to leave it all behind and go off and get swallowed up in a big city.

I see the promise--yes. But I also see, and all who are not blind can see, the tremendous problems we face if rural life is to be productive, comfortable and meaningful for all.

The conditions I have just described are not confined to any one section of the United States. They exist in Appalachia and Alaska, on the Mississippi Delta and in the Midwest, in New England and in California. They are widespread enough that they constitute a national problem.

This is a problem not just of the rural areas of America. It is in the cities that the seriousness of the problem comes into sharpest focus and the troubles that have shaken our cities are in large part symptoms of the ills of the countryside.

Poverty and misery are highly transportable items. Both apparently love company and so their movement is almost invariably from the isolation of rural areas to the congestion of our cities.

There--quite often--they explode and the damage of their explosion is one of the prices we pay for our neglect of rural education, rural health, rural transportation, rural housing and the rural economy.

Certainly the riots in our large cities, caused at least in part by the migration of hundreds of thousands of persons from country to city life, constitute a valid and just reason for our doing everything we can to make rural life more attractive and rural opportunity more abundant.

But, while riots put the problem into sharp focus, I sometimes wonder if we are not making too much of the relationship between rural poverty and big city strife. The existence of urban riots and unhappiness is not the main reason we must take fast and far-reaching action to improve the lot of our rural residents.

The main reason is simply that people are living in rural America without the means to enjoy full and abundant life, without the opportunity to share in the tremendous economic and social progress this country has made in recent years. Simple justice demands that we take action.

Indeed, the fact that refugees from the country continue to stream into

our cities, without any appreciable reverse migration as the result of riots, leads to the conclusion that, riots and all, squalor and rats and ghettos notwithstanding, urban living conditions still seem to be preferable to those in many rural areas.

Therefore, I suggest that it is both unwise and unjust to spend billions of dollars to try to improve life in the cores of our cities without an equal effort in rural America. I think we must have massive programs of development in all parts of rural America and that they must be supported by all levels of government and all segments of our society.

This must be solid development, not a series of hit and miss programs without real purpose other than to help keep a few heads above water. It is not enough to simply lift a man and his family above a level that has been declared the line between poverty and non-poverty. This is not answering the need of rural America or providing the youth of rural America with the promise or the opportunity they deserve.

We need better schools. We need better hospital facilities and medical care. We need better transportation. We need better housing. We need better job opportunities.

We need improved recreational facilities. We need water and sewer systems. We need libraries. We need public buildings.

We need--perhaps by the hundreds--whole new towns that provide the facilities, that provide the opportunities, that provide the services that are lacking in rural America today.

I know that you who listen to me here today represent a great reservoir of talent, ambition, industry and leadership and that you will have a great many ideas on how we can accomplish some of the things I have cited a need for. I hope you will return to the states and the organizations you represent and be activists in helping to find solutions and to put them into effect.

Let me suggest at this time that this is not a job to be turned over to the federal government alone. Surely we will have to depend on federal help--and on massive federal help--if we are to be successful but we cannot forget that there are other layers of government also serving the people.

Speaking as a governor, I would like to say that the states must be full partners in this effort and that the states must help to involve local governments.

This means that states must be willing to make the effort and that Washington must not bypass them unless they falter in their effort. It also means that local governments must be functional enough, skilled enough and interested enough to shoulder their responsibilities.

Encouragement that these things can come about is supported by two major governmental developments of recent years--developments that tend to give new life and vigor to state and local government and show that they can still function as more than collectors of taxes and builders of highways.

One is the concept under which states organize regional commissions and become partners of the federal government to accomplish certain states goals and solve problems common to the region. This has been most successful in the Appalachian Regional Commission.

The other concept is the creation of multi-county, development districts within states to give added strength to county and other local government units.

The first development--the organizing of states along regional lines--establishes federal-state ties that utilize the best abilities of both layers of government. The second development--multi-county districts within states--not only adds to the strength of local government, it provides state and federal agencies with better working arrangements with areas of a state.

Although these innovations are significant, I believe they are only two instances of innovation in government designed to make government more responsive to the people. I believe we can come up with equally meaningful developments to help us solve the problems of building a better rural economy and providing better services for rural people.

I do not wish to leave the impression that I think all is wrong with rural American or that the youth who live there are without hope or opportunity. Life is better there today than ever before but as our nation progresses and prospers the gap between the majority who share in that prosperity and the minority who do not grows wider and wider and many of that minority live in rural areas.

We have not recognized fully the changes that have occurred in these areas in recent years, and I hope that this conference will serve to point up the deficiencies in our understanding. We still tend to equate rural opportunity with the ability to make a living on a farm, although the need for farm labor has dropped rapidly in the last few years and will continue to do so.

We still place a major emphasis in our rural vocational training on farm related jobs when what we need to be teaching in many instances is industrial skills. In many areas rural children fail to get the proper academic subjects because the community is still trying to support a high school that a diminished tax base and a lowered population has made it impossible to support properly.

Although rural homes are better and more convenient than ever before,

they still do not compare to most city or suburban homes. This is true not only because of lower income in rural areas but because of a lack of interest on the part of builders and because of greater problems in getting building capital and credit.

Rural health has not kept pace because personnel are not willing to locate in many localities where living and cultural facilities are not good and to practice in inferior circumstances and for less income than in cities.

Often our rural residents, particularly the young, suffer from sheer boredom because of isolation. They do not have the chance to be interested or motivated into productive endeavor that their city cousins have.

All these things lessen the interest of our young people in staying in small towns and farm communities and hasten their exodus to the cities. This is tragic if they are the ones who are unskilled and unprepared to make a living in the city because they simply pile into slum areas on top of those who have preceded them in migration from the country.

It is equally tragic--at least to areas they leave--if they are intelligent and resourceful and have simply left their rural home because they could not find the full life and the opportunity they desired.

So I hope we will come up with some ideas at this conference--some ideas to help keep them down on the farm, or down in the industrial plant or professional office I hope we can establish in greater and greater number in our rural areas.

Rural America still presents a great challenge for its young people and--if we but recognize today's conditions instead of being deluded that those of yesterday still exist, and if we do some creative planning for tomorrow--we can make it a place full of opportunity, free from the handicaps and deprivations that now exist.

We can make it the answer to the dream men have dreamed since this great continent was settled.